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ABSTRACT

To determine whether a teacher's guidance of the writing process in the classroom can produce measurable improvement in students' writing and learning over the course of a semester, an instructor of a college business management course taught three sections of the same course, using the same texts and making the same assignments (six written case analyses), but approaching the writing process differently in each of the three sections. Section A was taught in the traditional way with an emphasis on lectures about business policy. Written case analyses were assigned with the assumption that students knew how to write, and that the instructor's job was to deal effectively with course content. In Section B, writing assignments were given in a manner designed to make the writing process more effective. Class discussion was frequently directed toward the nature of the writing process, and students were encouraged to use writing as a technique for developing thought. Section C was taught like Section B, except that students were also required to submit a draft of each written case analysis to an outside reader for review and then to revise the draft for final submission. The results suggest that the draft intervention and response technique used in Section C had a significant positive impact on students' rhetorical and analytical skills. A surprising result was the failure of the emphasis on writing in the lecture format to have a positive impact on either student performance or student improvement. (HOD)

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PROCESS-ORIENTED WRITING INSTRUCTION IN A CASE-METHOD CLASS

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Process-Oriented Writing Instruction

In a Case-Method Class

ABSTRACT

Three sections of the same case-method college business course were each given a different type of writing instruction, integrated with their instruction in business policy. The results suggested that draft intervention in the student writing process has a significant positive impact on students' rhetorical and analytical skills.

PROCESS-ORIENTED WRITING INSTRUCTION IN A CASE-METHOD CLASS

Within what is generally called the "writing across the curriculum" effort, college instructors in all disciplines are being urged to incorporate writing in their subject courses, and particularly to guide their students through the process of writing, rather than merely grading the final written product (LeFevre & Dickerson, 1981: Walvoord, 1982). That advice is based on a growing body of research which indicates that unskilled writers see the writing problem narrowly, primarily in terms of the number of words that must be produced on a given topic. Skilled writers are far more aware of audience and context, and deal more comprehensively with the complexity of the writing task (Flower & Hayes, 1980). Unskilled writers are more satisfied with their first drafts (Pianko, 1979), and they tend to revise even badly flawed first drafts only for matters such as grammar and word choice, rather than for content and organization, as skilled writers do (Sommers, 1980). Unskilled writers, in early drafts, agonize over grammar and punctuation--an obsession that may block appropriate consideration of content and organization (Perl, 1980).

The concept that teachers should guide the writing process is based on this research. However, it is logical to ask whether the pedagogical methods can be shown to produce measurable improvement in students' writing and learning over the course of a semester. This study attempted to do that.

Difficulties in Measuring Writing Progress

Few studies have attempted to measure progress in writing in a subject area course, as a result of pedagogical techniques. Weiss and Walters (1979) found that, in subject classes where the instructors were using the pedagogical methods (sometimes including draft response) commonly recommended for writing across the curriculum, students thought that they understood ideas better when they wrote about them. Also,

students who had written about a subject performed better on objective tests on that subject. However, there was no measurable improvement in writing skills, as measured by a post-test essay. One difficulty was that, because the students in the study were enrolled in a variety of subject area courses, the teaching methodologies, though all generally consonant with common practice in writing across the curriculum, did vary. Another problem is that it is extremely difficult to isolate a particular teaching strategy as a cause for improvement in writing (Klaus, 1982). Development of writing skill is a complex process, dependent upon many variables, not all of which are understood. Third, improvement in writing skill was measured by pre- and post tests different from the writing assignments the students were given in their subject courses. The problems inherent in such a procedure have been widely noted (Odell, 1982). Fourth, the test for writing was separate from the test for content knowledge, thus creating an artificial measure of performance. A further difficulty was that the two readers who evaluated the students' written post tests differed quite widely in their ratings. That is not surprising. It is well established that, unless special training techniques are utilized, teachers will differ markedly in their ratings of the same student paper, even if the teachers are teaching in the same field, and are similar in other respects such as experience in teaching (Diederich, 1974, pp. 5-6). This study attempted in so far as possible to mitigate those five research problems.

Materials and Methods

An instructor of college business management courses taught three sections of the same business management course, using the same texts and making the same assignments (6 written case analyses), but approaching the writing process differently in each of the three sections.

The instructor used the case study method, which is a common approach for courses in business management as well as other disciplines that emphasize problem-solving. In a paper of 2-5 pages, students analyze the firm's present situation, identify its problems,

and propose future action. The goal of case analysis is to help the student "to think" (Andrews, 1981, p. 5) and specifically to learn the "skill of systemic analysis: and the "skill of effective management action" (Turner, 1981, p. 7). Thus skill in writing a case analysis is taken in this study to mean that the student possesses a combination of analytical and rhetorical skills.

Every effort was made to keep the classes comparable except for the different approaches to the writing process. Students were assigned to the three sections through normal administrative enrollment procedures. Table 1 presents data on the characteristics of the students in the different sections. Analysis of student characteristics suggests greater differences among students in a given section than among students between sections. An analysis of variances did not reveal significant differences in the characteristics of students between classes.

To establish baseline data about students' writing ability when they entered the course, a written case analysis was used as a pretest. It was assigned and completed during the first week of class, before any specific instruction in writing had been given, and before any difference in instructional methods had been introduced.

After the pretest, writing was handled differently in each section, though text, instructor and course content otherwise remained the same. Section A was taught in the traditional way. There was an emphasis on lectures about business policy. Written case analyses were assigned with the assumption that students knew how to write, and that the instructor's job was to deal effectively with course content. No attempt was made to guide the process by which the students developed the paper. After grading, written cases were returned to students with injunctions to write more clearly, to be better organized, or to be more logical, as well as with comments directed toward the quality of the strategic analytical concepts in the paper. Subsequent class discussions about the case focused upon the content of the case, and the appropriate strategic framework from which recommendations for action in that case could be made.

This method is common is case method classes. Though designed to teach independent analytical skills, it has been criticized because the task of final integration and synthesization falls to the instructor. Thus, the student draws very little experience in systemic analysis from the case discussion approach, and the behavior exhibited bears little relevance to effective management behaviors (Turner, 1981; Argyris, 1980).

In section B, writing assignments were given in a manner designed to make the writing process more effective. Class discussion was frequently directed towards the nature of the writing process. Alternative writing strategies were explicitly considered. Students were encouraged to use writing as a technique for developing thought, though no class time was given to written heuristic exercises or to peer review of plans or drafts. Class discussion analyzed examples of student writing, and their relationship to the thought process. Audience and purpose, as well as standards for judgement, were specifically delineated. Lectures addressed theme development, paragraph structure, style and mechanics. The underlying assumption was that students did not necessarily know how to write effectively, that writing was part of the thinking process, and that it was the instructor's job to guide both.

Section C was taught like section B, except that students were also required to submit a draft of each written case analysis to an outside reader for critique, and then to revise that draft for final submission.

The outside reader was a composition instructor who worked individually with each student on one draft of each written case analysis. The composition instructor had helped construct the evaluation instrument and plan the classroom techniques used in the course, though she did not attend class sessions. She read each case and discussed it with the business instructor prior to conferences with students, but she had no formal training in business policy or in some of the other fields, such as accounting and finance, with which the students in the classes were expected to be familiar.

Each conference lasted 15 to 20 minutes. The students were instructed to bring to the conference a typed draft of their case analysis. To encourage them to take the draft

seriously, they were told that the quality of the draft would influence their final course grade. However, they knew that the draft could be revised before final submission.

The composition instructor's impression was that most students came to the conference expecting critique of grammar and punctuation. In fact, however, to their surprise, most of the conference time was spent on matters of focus, coherence, organization, and evidence. The composition instructor made it clear that only when these matters were largely in place would detailed attention be paid to word choice, grammar and punctuation. The composition instructor functioned primarily to support the student in using a first draft to arrive at a conceptual framework for the problem being addressed. She used primarily three response techniques:

1. Summarized what she read, and verbally reflected the paper's structure (or lack of it).
2. Asked questions, raised objections, praised points that were adequately supported, and reminded students of contrary evidence they had not adequately accounted for.
3. If the paper was basically sound in content and organization, the instructor responded to matters of style and grammar. If the paper was not basically sound, the instructor would point out general areas of concern for later editing, i.e., "I see you have several sentence fragments in your draft. When you get the paper's structure and content set, you'll want to edit carefully for that."

To overcome the problem of the unreliability of pre- and post tests separate from writing students were being taught in the course, only the actual writing assignments in the course were used as the basis for measuring student progress. The written case analyses from all three classes were evaluated blind by the instructor, who assigned a letter grade to each case analysis. Since prior research clearly indicates that teacher raters will differ significantly unless their scoring is normalized through training (Diederich, 1974), no attempt was made to alter the instructor's normal way of grading

student papers, or to normalize the instructor's responses with those of an outside evaluator. The goal was to measure the impact of teaching strategies upon student work as evaluated (blind) by the students' own instructor. The implication is that other teachers adopting similar instructional methods may also see improvement in their students' writing, as they evaluate that writing by their own normal procedures.

The instrument used for evaluating written case analyses was based upon the business instructor's and the composition instructor's analysis of the traits of successful and unsuccessful cases written for the same class in the past, and upon the business instructor's articulation of the qualities he looked for in written case analyses. The techniques used to compose the evaluation instrument were an adaptation of primary trait scoring (Lloyd-Jones, 1977, pp. 33-66), and Diederich's factor analysis (1974, pp. 5-10). Below is a brief outline of the factors, and their weight in the final grade:

The presence of a strategic orientation and a clear focus for the paper	30%
Adequacy of support	30%
Logical progression of ideas	20%
Precision of expression	10%
Mechanics: spelling, grammar, punctuation	10%

As part of the "process" approach, an explanation of these qualities was given to students in sections B and C, so they could specifically address, during their drafting, the standards on which the final paper would be measured.

To measure improvement, the grade on the first case analysis was compared to the "final grade." The final grade was a combination of all the written case analysis grades after the pre-test, with the heaviest weight going to the last case analysis (15% for the second through the fifth cases, and 40% for the final case).

The reason for using a composit "final grade" rather than merely the grade on the final case was to limit the effect of the variation in performance that a student might

show for a single written assignment, as a result of fatigue, time on task, ability to understand the factors present in that particular case, and other variables. This was judged particularly important, since it was the instructor's impression that some students who had strong technical skills in the financial area misdirected their efforts in analyzing the sixth case.

Results

Keeping in mind the limitations inherent in the small size of this study and in isolating the causative factors influencing writing in the classroom, a regression analysis (Table 2) of student performance and student improvement provides support for the contention that draft intervention is a powerful technique for improving both writing and mastery of course content. These regressions clearly suggest that the use of the draft intervention technique provided the most powerful explanation of student performance and student improvement. This finding is certainly consistent with the earlier research and theory cited. The draft response techniques used in Section C appeared to be a powerful force in helping students transcend the narrow, technical focus typical of unskilled writers. Instead, students were forced into asking the larger questions that could lead to the type of organizational and structural draft revisions typical of skilled writers. Likewise, the conferences appeared to help students overcome their unfocused concern with a number of fragmentary issues to arrive at a larger strategic framework.

A surprising result of this analysis was the failure of the emphasis on writing in the lecture format to have a positive impact on either student performance or student improvement once other factors were accounted for. The lack of statistically significant results for the classroom instruction in the writing process (section B) is, we believe, a reflection of the section B students' preoccupation with writing mechanics at the expense of the meaning of what they tried to write. Early in the course, the classroom emphasis on writing appeared to produce both oral and written case analyses that were substantially better than those of students in the traditional taught section A. However, as the

students grew in their awareness of the subtleties and complexities surrounding strategic management issues, they found such issues increasingly difficult to articulate in written form. Since the students were conscious of the importance of the written form, and appeared to interpret the demands for "good writing" very narrowly, they apparently reacted by simplifying their perception of reality. This difficulty affected their written case analyses, and, in the instructor's perception, also their in-class oral case analyses.

In-class emphasis upon the importance of writing, even though that emphasis was process-oriented, appeared insufficient to help students overcome two pitfalls of early writers--the inability to make major revisions in focus and structure of early drafts, and an early preoccupation with mechanics that impedes appropriate attention to strategic issues. Accepted theories of learning emphasize that learners are motivated to change by a keen awareness of the disparity between what they think they know, and the perceptions of reality forced upon them. Likewise writers are motivated to substantially revise drafts by a keen awareness of the disparity between what they have written and the ideal finished product. (Flower & Haynes, 1981). They may also be motivated by an acute awareness of their reader's confusion or dismay--a reaction that skilled writers can imagine but that unskilled writers, with their limited audience awareness, need to see directly. These important ingredients were provided by the draft response in section C, but not by the in-class discussions of the writing process in section B.

Finally, though no formal record of students' out-of-class writing behavior was gathered, it appears that students in section B frequently ignored in-class advice about starting the writing process early, and thus began their written case analyses closer to the final deadline than did the students required to bring drafts for response. Student evaluations completed at the end of the course suggest that simply having to do the draft by a certain deadline was a significant benefit of the draft response method. Appreciation of the value of the deadline was common even to those students who remained sceptical about the composition instructor's advice, because of her lack of a business background.

A particularly interesting finding is the positive coefficient for the number of college level English courses taken, as a factor in student improvement. This is perhaps an indication that exposure to "English" courses per se actually foster the development of skills which may be used by the student to learn more effectively -- particularly in a context where writing is an integral part of the thought processes necessary to successful performance in the course. In a similar vein, the significance of the writing experience variable in impacting an overall course performance suggests that experience writing in any context develops more rigorous thought processes. The failure of writing experience to explain student improvement may be interpreted to indicate that while this factor imparts a greater ability to perform it does not necessarily provide the capacity for self-improvement that the formal exposure to writing in an English course does.

Conclusion

It is recognized that the complexity of the factors that may impinge on the quality of writing makes it difficult to control the variables in the experiment for the purposes of establishing cause and effect (Klaus, 1982). Nevertheless, we feel that this experiment yields insight into the suitability of using the writing process to increase student analytical and rhetorical skills in a case method course at the college level. However, great care must be exercised or the emphasis on writing may impact in a negative fashion, causing a preoccupation with writing mechanics that will obscure the larger objectives of the course. The difficulty of communicating to the student what is involved in good writing is easily underestimated. Actual draft response may be required to help students use first drafts as exploratory and analytical instruments. Time constraints need not be a prohibitive factor in implementing such an approach.

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TABLE 1

Class Characteristics

Student Characteristics (standard deviation in parenthesis)	CLASS A (traditional)	CLASS B (augmented with lectures)	CLASS C (augmented with lectures and draft intervention)
Number of Students	10	18	16
Cumulative Grade Point Average[1]	2.67 (.48)	2.86 (.45)	2.96 (.23)
College Level English Courses (Number)	2.50 (.85)	2.78 (.81)	2.81 (.98)
Business Experience (Years)	2.91 (1.95)	2.30 (2.12)	2.45 (2.06)
Self Evaluation of Writing Ability[2]	3.10 (.74)	3.06 (.42)	3.12 (.62)
Self Evaluation of Writing Experience[3]	2.00 (1.25)	1.11 (1.49)	1.94 (1.12)
Performance on Initial (Control) Case	2.90 (1.73)	3.83 (2.15)	3.75 (1.95)

[1]Scale: A = 4.0, F = 0.0

[2]Scale: A+ = 11.0, F = 1.0

[3]Scale: 1 (very low) to 5 (very high)

*Means not significantly different (ANOVA) at P = .05

TABLE 2

Stepwise Regression

OVERALL PERFORMANCE LEVEL

$Y_1 =$	5.26	+ 1.80 X_2* (3.36)					$R^2 = 0.22$
$Y_1 =$	3.91	+ 1.62 X_2* (3.29)	+ 1.64 X_1* (3.00)				$R^2 = 0.30$
$Y_1 =$	2.95	+ 1.89 X_2* (3.40)	+ 1.54 X_1 (1.98)	+ 1.41 X_5* (2.80)			$R^2 = 0.37$
$Y_1 =$	1.02	+ 1.80 X_2* (3.35)	+ 1.23 X_1 (1.87)	+ 1.30 X_5* (2.95)	+ 1.75* X_4 (2.35)		$R^2 = 0.42$
$Y_1 =$	0.235	+ 1.70 X_2* (3.17)	+ 0.86 X_1 (1.44)	+ 1.65* X_4 (2.15)	+ 1.26 X_5* (2.15)	+ 1.69 X_5* (2.46)	$R^2 = 0.44$

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

$Y_2 =$	2.96	+ 1.75 X_2*			$R^2 = 0.16$
$Y_2 =$	0.90	+ 1.73 X_2* (2.35)	+ 1.0 X_6* (2.31)		$R^2 = 0.24$
$Y_3 =$	0.22	+ 1.67 X_2* (2.25)	+ 0.96 X_6* (2.31)	+ 1.26 X_1 (1.53)	$R^2 = 0.26$

VARIABLES

Y_1 = overall course performance (final course grade)
Y_2 = course improvement (difference between final case grade and control case grade)
X_1 = dummy variable for section B (traditional course augmented with lectures on writing
X_2 = dummy variable for section C (traditional course augmented with lectures on writing and draft intervention
X_3 = sex (1 = male; 0 = female)
X_4 = student cumulative grade point average on entering the course
X_5 = self evaluation of writing experience
X_6 = number of college level English courses taken

NOTE: "T" statistics in parentheses

*Significant at p = .05.